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RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 1518  
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 5853  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 1124  
RUEHGT/AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA PRIORITY 0170  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ MAR 4493  
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY 1321  
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO PRIORITY 6254  
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO PRIORITY 0239  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 000465

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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: CHAVEZ'S ANTI-BUSH RALLY

Classified By: Ambassador E. Anthony Wayne for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez led an inflammatory anti-Bush, anti-imperialism rally on March 9 in Buenos Aires in which he called President Bush a "political cadaver." Argentine President Nestor Kirchner allowed the rally to take place but was careful to distance himself from the actual event, saying nothing about it to the press, sending no high-level GOA officials, and attending a film festival out of Buenos Aires during the rally itself. The four-hour rally capped a day of protests at the Uruguayan Embassy, the American Club, and the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires. Argentine press coverage noted Kirchner's mixed message of allowing Chavez's visit to take place while remaining distant from the event itself, but has also focused on a fair amount of objective coverage of Bush's visit. END SUMMARY.

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The Rally  
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¶2. (C) Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez led an anti-Bush anti-imperialism rally on March 9 in Buenos Aires with a crowd of approximately 20,000 to 30,000 supporters. Chavez's rhetoric was predictably an inflammatory criticism of President Bush and U.S. policies that dragged on for about two hours. He called Bush a "political cadaver" and ridiculed U.S. offers of foreign aid in the region. He also used Bush's comments about sharing a common heritage as sons of liberators (George Washington and Simon Bolivar) to allude to what kind of "son" he thinks Bush is. Chavez praised Kirchner several times in his speech and said that Argentina and Venezuela are working on strengthening the bilateral "union" between them, something that Kirchner has never mentioned. He highlighted his meeting earlier in the day with Kirchner and the many accords they signed to bring the two countries closer. Chavez claimed that his visit to Argentina was not motivated by "sabotaging" Bush's Latin American tour and that it was mere coincidence that he happened to be visiting Buenos Aires during Bush's visit to Uruguay.

¶3. (C) Chavez financed the four-hour event, which capped a day of protests at the Uruguayan Embassy, the American Club, and the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires. According to Embassy

sources, 200 Venezuelan troops accompanied Chavez to Buenos Aires, reportedly without the required Argentine Congressional approval for the ingress of foreign troops or their weapons. The crowd was composed of various anti-U.S. and leftist groups, not all of which are pro-Kirchner, and was organized by the Argentine organization Madres de Plaza de Mayo headed by Hebe de Bonafini. The crowd could be heard chanting and singing during Chavez's speech, so loudly that it forced Chavez to pause at least twice. (COMMENT: The chanting was sometimes in response to Chavez' speech, but sometimes indicated a party-like atmosphere that perhaps distracted the crowd from the speech itself. END COMMENT.) Politicians and other prominent figures in attendance included: Congressmen Rafael Bielsa, Edgardo Depetri, and Miguel Bonasso CTA Union leaders Hugo Yasky, Claudio Lozano, and Victor de Gennaro; and piquetero leader Luis D'Elia.

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Kirchner and Chavez Meet  
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14. (C) Argentine President Nestor Kirchner allowed the rally but was careful to distance himself from the actual event, saying nothing about it to the press, sending no high-level GOA officials, and attending a film festival out of Buenos Aires during the rally itself. He received Chavez at his residence in Buenos Aires, where the two agreed to allow other countries to join their 'Bank of the South' and signed 11 agreements, including the formation of a Gas Producer Nations organization along the lines of OPEC. In the photos taken after the meeting, Chavez and Cristina and Nestor Kirchner are shown smiling and laughing, which were viewed by some analysts here as early campaign photos for Cristina, who is rumored to be the Kirchner candidate for the

presidential elections this October. Embassy sources have reported that Cristina Kirchner specifically chose to attend the film festival on March 9 so she would be out of the city during Chavez's rally.

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TV/Press Coverage  
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15. (U) Argentine press coverage gave a lot of attention to Chavez and the rally, but has also focused on a fair amount of objective coverage of Bush's visit. Several Argentine

television stations covered Chavez's speech, but interrupted coverage for Cristina Kirchner's speech at a film festival in Mar del Plata. None of the stations covering the rally returned to uninterrupted coverage of Chavez's speech after that, broadcasting instead small clips in between headline recaps, horse races, the lottery, and commercials. Even Bush's arrival in Uruguay trumped coverage of Chavez' speech.

16. (U) The two major papers both covered Chavez's visit on the front page. Clarin ran a pro-Chavez piece on the front page and then offered strong criticisms of Chavez inside. La Nacion focused on the Argentina-Venezuela agreements signed yesterday on the front page, but also ran a piece that claimed Kirchner had taken a step back in U.S.-Argentine relations. Coverage of Bush's message has been objective and steady, with many of his key points being covered in the newspapers here.

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Protest at U.S. Embassy  
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17. (U) About 450 to 500 protesters demonstrated in front of the Embassy on March 9 for approximately 35 minutes. The protest was peaceful, with demonstrators displaying large banners, playing music, and blocking traffic. Participants included: Izquierda Socialista, Movimiento Socialista de los Trabajadores (MST), Movimiento Teresa Rodriguez, 12 de Abril, Partido Comunista de Peru (PCP), and Partido Obrero. The banners said "Fuera Bush de Uruguay" (Bush--Get out of

Uruguay). According to RSO, Argentine Federal Police support to the Embassy was excellent, providing about 200 uniformed officers and riot police to guard the Embassy and the near-by Ambassador's Residence.

18. (U) Earlier in the day, protesters demonstrated at the Embassy of Uruguay where they burned a U.S. flag and spray-painted the street. the ultra-radical piquetero group, Quebracho, rallied in the city center at the obelisk and marched to the American Club, where about 40 to 50 masked protesters burned effigies of President Bush and U.S. flags, and sprayed graffiti on near-by buildings. No injuries were reported in any of the protests.

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Comment  
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19. (C) President Kirchner seems to have tried to display positive relations with Chavez for the official part of the trip to Buenos Aires, and then to appear uninvolved with Chavez's rally and anti-U.S. rhetoric. However, allowing the rally was enough to earn the criticism of several political analysts and politicians, who feel Chavez's rally violated the sovereignty of Argentina and that Kirchner's permission for the event shows he is beholden to Chavez for the purchase of bonds. Several opposition politicians from various parties criticized in the press Kirchner's acquiescence to Chavez, indicating that Argentine society may be starting to see the relationship with Chavez as more compromising than beneficial. END COMMENT.  
WAYNE